

To: Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut Legislature
From: William O. Riiska
Member, Board of Directors, Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce
Chair, Government Relations Committee, Northwest Connecticut Chamber
My office:
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Date: February 28, 2011

Re: Budget proposal for Community Colleges

Thank you for the opportunity to support the funding for Connecticut's Community Colleges and Northwestern Connecticut Community College in particular.

I am writing and testifying at the direction of the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, which covers twenty towns in northwest Connecticut.

The business community in northwest Connecticut has long recognized NCCC to be an institution of major importance to northwest Connecticut. Not only does NCCC supply first class educational opportunities to people of all ages in our area, but it is one of our larger employers, and it is crucial to the economic and social vitality of Winsted. The importance of having such an educational institution within reasonable driving distance cannot be overemphasized.

Each year, the Chamber's Government Relations Committee prepares and the Board adopts a legislative agenda setting forth our take on the important issues that Connecticut faces. Supporting a well-educated work force, and including programs at NCCC, has always been a major priority. We have recognized the general business education programs and those specific to particular areas as crucial to northwest Connecticut.

For instance, over the past few years, the Chamber has had at the very top of its list of priorities the establishment of a nursing education program at NCCC. We were pleased to have representatives in the crowd at the ceremony at the college earlier this year celebrating the institution of that program. We advocated heavily for this program because we recognized the numerous ways in which this program would be crucial to our area, such as:

- addressing the well known shortage in nurses in Connecticut;
- strengthening not only the college, but also two hospitals that would act as teaching facilities, all large employers in our area;
- allowing better access for residents of our area to training for good paying jobs -- otherwise residents of our area will have to drive prohibitive distances to obtain that training;
- contributing to the revitalization of Winsted by bring more people into town.

Statement of William O. Riiska to Appropriations Committee

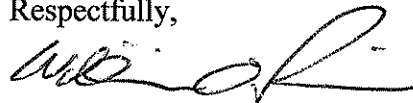
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Re: Community College funding

The Chamber has been equally supportive of programs that address the workforce educational needs of manufacturers in our area.

At the same time, we acknowledge the budgetary constraints that the state is confronting and recognize that many worthy programs will not escape sharp pencils. While these difficult times may require reduced government spending, some programs still demand support. NCCC is at the top of the priority list.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Riiska', written in a cursive style.

William O. Riiska

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